
**Linda Wong, Lynn White and Gui Shixun (eds.),
*Social Policy Reform in Hong Kong and Shanghai. A Tale
of Two Cities***

Armonk (N.Y.), London, M.E. Sharpe, 2004, 292 p.

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NOTE DE L'ÉDITEUR

Translated from the French original by Peter Brown

- 1 This collective work edited by Linda Wong, Lynn White and Gui Shixun offers an excellent overview of the social policies of Shanghai and Hong Kong, at the same time contributing to enrichment of a field of study that has until recently been left rather barren in the West. It brings together a number of experts on Shanghai and Hong Kong, and clearly shows the quality of the work in this area being done by Chinese scholars who have not always been easily accessible, some not having published in English.
- 2 The study is centred around the various branches of social policy in these two cities. Chapter by chapter, there is discussion of the health and retirement systems, of the employment policies and the fight against poverty. Other themes more specific to these two case studies—such as the policies of education, housing and immigration management—are also tackled. Taken as a whole, the nine chapters offer an exhaustive, up-to-date overview of good quality, underpinned moreover by wide-ranging bibliographies.
- 3 It is, however, to be regretted that several of the contributions remain very descriptive. More regular links with the sociological literature tackling the subject of the construction of the social state would have enabled the work to take greater account of the important social and political questions determining the solutions adopted. These

types of arguments are not completely absent, but find themselves confined to the concluding paragraphs of each of the chapters and to the excellent synthesis provided by Lynn White at the end of the work.

- 4 The least convincing aspect of the work lies in the choice of the cases studied. It is obvious that, in a context marked by important variations in the system of social protection between the various parts of the territory, the choice made to compare two cities was an obvious one. The only problem is the choice of Hong Kong and Shanghai. Of course, both these cities have been affected by Western colonisation, and today they both belong to the People's Republic of China, and play a central role in the development and the opening up of the Chinese economy to the outside world. However, these two economic poles have followed very different paths that have left a strong imprint on the construction of their social state. In Shanghai, the development of social policies centre around state-run enterprises dates back to the introduction of the communist regime in the 1950s, whereas in Hong Kong they became consolidated from the 1970s around a liberal and conservative state. We are therefore dealing with two fundamentally different models, even if it is true—and this is pointed out by the writers—that they are engaging in reform by sometimes applying rather similar models. One of the undoubted interests of the work is to bring this clearly out. However, quite often the comparisons drawn very systematically at the end of each chapter can do no more than state the difference between the social systems of the two cities. Consequently, the comparison comes up short, and the arguments put forward by the writers throughout the book to justify their choice are hardly convincing.
- 5 After finishing the work, one is, admittedly, grateful for having read the excellent case studies on the various aspects of the social policies of Hong Kong and Shanghai, but less convinced by the relevance of the comparison. The reader may well be left with the feeling that the choice of the two cities is to be understood in the context of a highly publicised debate on the future of Hong Kong faced with the rise of Shanghai.